



Considering Culture in Developing an EFL Curriculum for K-8 Learners in Turkey

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Introduction

- Despite the widespread recognition of the need for teaching about culture, its incorporation in English language teaching programs, not to mention efforts to implement cultural instruction in the classroom, has not always been successfully carried out (Çelik & Erbay, 2013).
- Türkan and Çelik (2007) note that the inclusion of culture has encountered numerous difficulties, including:
 - substandard teaching materials;
 - teachers' lack of familiarity with English-speaking culture;
 - an overcrowded curriculum;
 - limited classroom time.

In this presentation, we will demonstrate how these issues may be addressed by exploring the recent development of an EFL curriculum for K-8 learners in Turkey.

Developing an EFL Curriculum for K-8 Learners

- A recent overhaul of Turkey's public educational system has resulted in a new educational model that has decreased the starting level at which English is to be taught from the 4th grade to the 2nd grade (MoNE, 2013).
- In addition, the age at which children enter elementary education has been decreased by one year.
- As a result of this shift, students now begin learning English at six to six ½ years of age, rather than at the previous age of nine to nine ½ years.
- This structural change, along with other methodological concerns, created an immediate need to redesign the existing English Language Teaching (ELT) curriculum (Kırkgöz, Çelik, & Arıkan, 2014).

Theoretical and Pedagogical Considerations in Developing the New Turkish ELT Curriculum (1 of 3)

Language learning and young children.

- The new ELT program was designed with a view to Vygotsky's theory that young children learn best in the context of social interaction.
- With respect to foreign language learning, in particular, Cameron (2001) points out that young learners acquire new knowledge most effectively in a hands-on environment, carrying out tasks that they perceive as fun in a safe, enjoyable atmosphere.
- Accordingly, the new curriculum comprises learner-centered tasks and activities that are aimed at the relevant age groups, as well as accounting for a variety of different learning styles (MoNE, 2013). Recommended activities include:
 - Role play;
 - Dialogue;
 - Songs and chants;
 - Total Physical Response (TPR) exercises;
 - Art projects;
 - Story-telling.

Theoretical and Pedagogical Considerations in Developing the New Turkish ELT Curriculum (2 of 3)

Relevance to learners' daily lives.

- Influential theorists such as Hymes (1972) and Widdowson (1978) have stressed that effective language learning can only occur when the forms and lexis of the target language are taught in an authentic communicative context that has real meaning for learners.
- To meet this requirement, the curriculum was structured around familiar topics such as family, home, friends, school, and other age-appropriate concerns (Kırkgöz, Çelik, & Arıkan, 2014; MoNE, 2013).

Theoretical and Pedagogical Considerations in Developing the New Turkish ELT Curriculum (3 of 3)

Communicative Competence and the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)*.

- Another major consideration in designing the new curriculum was the need to account for the following principles of the *CEFR*:
 - Developing not only of communicative competence;
 - Raising but of intercultural awareness (CoE, 2001).
- To foster both communicative competence and intercultural awareness, the program designers believed that all of the following skills should be emphasized:
 - Listening;
 - Speaking;
 - Reading;
 - Writing;
 - Culture - including English-speaking, home and world cultures (Kırkgöz, Çelik, & Arıkan, 2014).

Incorporating Cultural Elements in the Context of EFL Instruction for K-8 Learners

In light of the criteria outlined here, the finalized curriculum stipulates that:

Elements of both the target culture and international cultures are presented in a positive and non-threatening manner (Elyıldırım & Ashton-Hayes, 2006) in keeping with the themes of each unit, at the same time stressing the value of home culture in order to avoid the formation of negative attitudes. Learners/users are exposed to simple phrases in world languages that include greetings, counting and so on as they learn about aspects of other cultures that are similar to or different from their own (MoNE, 2013, p. IV).

An example from the teaching program that demonstrates the incorporation of culture in classroom learning is provided on the following slide.

Implementation of Teaching Materials According to the Curricular Model

A series of teaching texts and related materials was subsequently developed based on the guidelines set forth in the new teaching program.

As specified in the curriculum, cultural elements were presented alongside the structural and lexical aspects of English.

Conclusion

Teaching about culture, and English-speaking culture in particular, is an important, but often controversial topic. Issues such as teachers' lack of awareness of the target culture and world cultures, insufficient teaching materials, lack of time, and even animosity toward foreign cultures are frequently cited as obstacles to including cultural elements in the foreign language classroom.

However, given the importance of cultural awareness in allowing meaningful communication to take place, this aspect of language education cannot be reasonably overlooked. This study demonstrates that an ELT curriculum and materials can be designed in such a way that learners can explore various aspects of foreign culture alongside the linguistic features of the language in a manner that is affirming, engaging, and relevant.

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Thank you!